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Formalismo Tcheco-Russo

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Tomáš Glanc*

Abstract: The present work is dedicated to the discussion of the influence of Russian formalism over the Prague Linguistic Circle and the Czech structuralism as a whole. For that, the author presents the reader with different points of view, including from the Czech scholars themselves. The conclusion reached by the author is that structuralism is not a continuation or an evolution of the formalism, but a trend in itself that opposes its predecessor.

Resumo: O presente trabalho é dedicado à discussão da influência do formalismo russo sobre o Círculo Lingüístico de Praga e o estruturalismo tcheco como um todo. Para tanto, o autor apresenta ao leitor diversos pontos de vista, inclusive dos próprios estudiosos tchecos. A conclusão a que chega o autor é que o estruturalismo não é uma continuação ou uma evolução do formalismo, mas uma tendência em si mesma que se opõe a seu antecessor.

Palavras-chave: Círculo Linguístico de Praga; Estruturalismo tcheco; Formalismo Russo; Crítica literária; Teoria Literária

Keywords: Prague Linguistic Circle; Czech structuralism; Russian Formalism; Literary Criticism; Literary Theory

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The Czech reception of Russian formalism is characterized by the specific fact that in the 1920s and 1930s there was a theoretical school looking back at certain authors (see below) that was perceived as a direct continuation of Russian formalism and which, from the 1920s, was described as the “Prague School” or later as “Czech Structuralism.” The connection with representatives of Russian formalism, who since the 1910s had been concentrated primarily in the society OPOJAZ (*Obshchestvo Izucheniia Poeticheskogo Iazyka*; Society for the Study of Poetic Language) and in the Moscow Linguistic circle, became a question of genealogy and the logic of theoretical thought. No doubt, the original sources and the first stages of these connections come from the 1920s, as will be discussed later. However, the questions about these connections and their chronology and about the influence of Russian formalism became particularly important 50 years after the first signs of institutionalization of new theoretical concepts, in the 1960s when French structuralism was established and prompted the much-delayed reception of formalism in Western Europe.¹

With the exception of the area of Slavic Studies, until the second half of the 1960s formalism was almost unknown to European academia. For example, the outstanding specialist in Slavic studies Renate Lachmann (*1936) learned about formalism only in the beginning of the ‘60s while working in Cologne as an assistant to the Slavistics professor Hildegard

¹ Todorov’s anthology was published in France: *Théorie de la littérature, textes des formalistes Russes*. Paris, 1965. Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays. University of Nebraska Press, 1965. Shklovsky was the first to be published first in Germany: *Sentimentale Reise*. Frankfurt: a.M., 1964; *Zoo oder Briefe nicht über die Liebe*. Frankfurt: a.M., 1965; *Schriften zum Film*. Frankfurt: a.M., 1966; *Theorie der Prosa*. Frankfurt: a.M., 1966. EICHENBAUM, Boris. *Aufsätze zur Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur*. Frankfurt: a.M., 1965. TYNJANOV, Jurij. *Die literarischen Kunstmittel und die Evolution in der Literatur*. Frankfurt: a.M., 1967, but most important were the two volumes by Jurij Striedter (Ed.): *Russischer Formalismus*. München 1969 and 1971.

Schroeder, who mentioned the formalists in her dissertation on 18th century satire in verse.² After Erlich's first monograph on formalism (1955), it was only in the second half of the 1960s that the French anthology of formalist texts (edited by Tsvetan Todorov, 1965) and the German anthology (edited by Jurij Striedter) were published. The reception of formalism was completely different in the Czech speaking territories, where from the end of the '20s, there were some translations of works by Shklovsky, Tynyanov, Tomashevsky, Brik, and Eichenbaum. In addition, at the time there were many philologists (Grigory Vinokur, Yury Tynyanov, Petr Bogatyrev) visiting or living in Prague.

The suggestion, articulated by scholars such as Lubomír Doležel, Ladislav Matejka,³ or Emil Volek⁴ that the contribution of the Prague structuralism was underestimated due to the language barrier and the almost complete absence of translations (most texts were available only in Czech), was an observation expressed only in retrospect. In addition, after World War II communist countries excluded formalism and structuralism from the official scholarship. After the war, the "censorship and the canon," or the ideological manipulation of the intellectual heritage organized at a government level, known from the Soviet Union of the 1930s, continued to work in an intensified manner in Czechoslovakia and the other "socialist" countries as a system of canonizing both the subject of the prohibition, as well as its representatives. Viktor Shklovsky, for example, wrote his ironic *Monument of an Academic Error* (published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on 27 January, 1930), continuing a sequence of even earlier attempts to bury formalism. The Prague Linguistic Circle ceased all its activities in the beginning of the 1950s. Some of its members, who had remained in Czechoslovakia, either somehow adjusted to the new circumstances or quit working in the structuralist school. After 1948 Mukařovský becomes a kind of a university clerk and a Marxist literary

² Letter dated 01.07. 2017.

³ MATĚJKA, Ladislav. *Sociologické zájmy Pražské školy*. In: SLÁDEK, Ondřej (ed.). *Český strukturalismus v diskusi*. Brno: 2014, pp. 13-22.

⁴ VOLEK, Emil. *Jan Mukařovský redivivus: Co zůstalo z tradice a dědictví pražské školy?*. In: SLÁDEK, Ondřej (ed.). *Český strukturalismus po poststrukturalismu*. Brno: 2006, pp. 32-41.

sociologist in service of the new regime and in 1951 he publishes a self-critical study rejecting structuralism (and so did many other outstanding philologists such as František Trávniček and Vladimir Skalička among others). Most of the other members of the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC) adjusted to the new circumstances up to a certain degree too.

On the one hand, all these facts legalized the rejection of the scholarly achievements of formalism and structuralism and paralyzed any possibility of discussing them freely, and on the other hand, like any act of censorship, they supported the canonical potential of the subject of criticism, simply because characteristically these were acts imposed by force. Similar ambivalence can be seen in the case of Roman Jakobson who, being protected by both his American citizenship and his employer, started visiting the Soviet Union and other countries of the Soviet bloc⁵ after 1956, despite the criticism of some of his colleagues, including Vladimir Nabokov and his own brother Sergei,⁶ a research fellow at the Library of Congress in Washington. Jakobson, however, decided to be so careful and so diplomatic that he was able to visit the countries of the Soviet bloc until his death in 1982. (Considering that he participated in the Tbilisi symposium on the problems of the unconscious activities of the mind, his last trip to the Soviet Union must have been in 1979.)

Both during his trips and at home in the USA, Jakobson abstained from expressing himself about any topics related to the academic and political circumstances in the 'Slavic' countries, as well as about the persecution or the liquidation of some of his colleagues and friends. So, Jakobson becomes an official guest of the academic communist elites who is nevertheless watched by the organs of the state security and suspected of dissident activities and the dissemination of unwanted books.

5 BARAN, Kh.; DUSHECHKINA, E.V.. *Pis'ma P. G. Bogatyreva R. O. Jakobsonu* (Letters of P.G. Bogatyreva to R. O. Jakobson). *Slavianovedenie*, 1997, 5, pp. 67-99

6 In a letter to his brother from 1956 Sergei says that he is enraged by the announcement of the invitation from Moscow and expresses his hope that his brother is not going to be so blind as to become a weapon in the hands of the Moscow gangsters and fall prey to the Soviet propaganda, and that he will not disgrace himself by accepting that invitation. See *Formal'naia shkola* (Formalist School). Moscow, 2011.p. 243

Consequently, as a result of the government manipulation of the public discourse and of private forms of resistance against the machinery – in form of individual seminars, personal meetings, the sporadic mention, etc., the reception of formalism and the continuation of the practices of structuralism become both a taboo and a myth.

The renewed interest in formalism at the peak of structuralism at the end of the 1960s supported a thesis that was not self-evident until the end of the 1930s, namely that there was a close connection between Russian formalism and the Prague School, which seemed to have taken over and developed further the formalist concepts and postulates.

There are no doubts regarding the terminological analogy between the Prague Linguistic Circle (established in 1926) and the Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915-1924). Nevertheless, the analysis of the publications from the 1920s and the 1930s allows us to think that the reception of the relationship between formalism and Czech structuralism (here Czech is meant in a geographical sense while all participants from Russia, Germany, Ukraine, etc. are considered) as an organic relationship, demonstrating continuity in development, is merely a retrospective construct, contradicting many statements of the immediate participants in the described processes. Some of the most prominent representatives of the Prague Linguistic Circle (Mukařovský, Weingart) repeatedly mention the independence of their school of thought from the Russian formalism.⁷ In the case of Weingart, some of the representatives of the circle such as Havránek and Jakobson, even criticize him, accusing him in being attached to the work of the formalists and pointing out that his studies differ from Russian formalism only in that they show his “helplessness.”⁸ In turn, Weingart blames the Prague Linguistic Circle for being uncritical in their reception of formalism.⁹

7 MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Jan. K metodologii iterární vědy (1944). In: *Cestami poetiky a estetiky*. Prague, 1971, pp. 183-200.

8 *Pražský lingvistický kroužek v dokumentech*. Prague, 2012, pp. 183-184.

9 WEINGART, Miloš. Úvaha o zkoumání českého jazyka, zvláště básnického, a tzv. strukturalismu. In: *Časopis pro moderní filologii*, 1936, 4, p. 368.

We shall recall the fact that Miloš Weingart was one of the founders of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Some meetings took place in his home. He was a well-known philologist and had an influential position in both the Prague and the Bratislava Universities. He also defended the academic and the political interests of the Prague Linguistic Circle before the Academy of Science. He left the Circle in 1934 and afterwards became subject to strong criticism. One of the meetings of the Circle (17.12.1935) was dedicated to denouncing his scholarly work.¹⁰

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Prague Linguistic Circle (1936) its founder Wilhelm Mathesius also took a stand against drawing a direct link between the reception of the Russian “examples” and their “influence.”¹¹ He claimed that calling this “transferring of the Russian models” is a formulation of an enemy and, long before his meeting with the “young Russians”, he described his own position as polemical vis a vis the theories of the Young Grammarians (also Neogrammarians). According to Mathesius’ view of 1936, the creative efforts of the Circle represented a “real Slavic academic commonality.”¹²

We should emphasize that the anniversary materials published for the tenth anniversary of the Circle, which was presented as a major event in a large number of greetings and in the resume of achievements,¹³ do not mention any connection to formalism at all. In his discussion of the structure of the Czech language at the end of 1935 (B. Havránek) Jakobson allows for some use of formalism for the structuralist approach, while he stresses, however, that formalism was mechanical and that one should not stick to theses that represented simply a childhood disease of the new direction in literary criticism.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 181-184

¹¹ See e.g., SVOBODA, Karel. O takzvané formální metodě v literární vědě (On the so-called formalistic method in literary criticism). In: *Naše věda*, 1934, 2. pp. 37-45.

¹² *Slovo a slovesnost*, year 2 (1936), number 3, p. 145.

¹³ See the description of the formal meeting with dozens of greetings on 3.11.1936 in *Pražský lingvistický kroužek v dokumentech 2012*, pp. 215-219.

¹⁴ *Slovo a slovesnost*, year 1 (1935), number 3, c. 192. The statement “Formalism is a childhood illness of structuralism” is cited without a reference to the source by the last wife

The goal of these observations is not the systematic overview of the evaluations of formalism mentioned above but rather showing some trends that connect the positions of the 1920s and 1930s with the discussions of the 1960s, when an intellectual platform related to the Marxists with revisionist inclinations, to the supporters of structuralism (Robert Kalivoda and others), as well as to the theorists of surrealism (mainly Bratislav Effenberger) was gradually established in Czechoslovakia. All of them were interested in structuralism and in its connection with formalism on the basis of Jan Mukařovský's work and also in relation to the French structuralism of the time (Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and others.) Mukařovský was one of those scholars who was inspired by the ideas of the Russian formalists of the 1920s—though never unconditionally¹⁵ — and who later became their critic¹⁶ and started emphasizing those roots of the Prague School which were not connected to formalism, as Oleg Sus, among others, explains in detail.

We could establish several schematic trends representing different models of reception or the existing doubts about it: On one hand we see emphasis on the direct connection (Wellek and later, in a more popular and influential form also Terry Eagleton), and on the other hand emphasis on the unique genealogy of Czech structuralism, generally based on the intellectual tradition of the so called Herbartianism (Mukařovský, Sus). Of course, many authors tried to define different versions of a compromise or of a combination between these two points of view, looking for support in different sources and in different

of Jakobson, Kristina Pomorska, in the title of her article "Poetics of Prose". In: JAKOBSON, Roman; POMORSKA, Krystyna; RUDY, Stephen (ed.). *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time*. University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p. 169.

15 Peter Václav Zima studies the tension between aesthetic autonomy and the social dimension of art in his article "Formalismus und Strukturalismus zwischen Autonomie und Engagement. Sieben Thesen." In: SCHWARZ, Wolfgang F. (Ed.). *Prager Schule. Kontinuität und Wandel*. Frankfurt/M.. 1997, pp. 305-315.

16 We can show as an example Peter Steiner's epilogue entitled "The Roots of Structuralist Esthetics". STEINER, Peter. *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929-1946*. University of Texas Press, 1982, pp. 174-219.

nuances.¹⁷ At the end of the 1980s Yuriy Striedter, one of the leading specialists on the reception of formalism in Germany, defined an unifying view that takes into account the variety of approaches and motivations.

In his detailed analysis subtitled “Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered” Jurij Striedter shows the continuity between the two schools clearly and convincingly. At the same time he suggests that there is a certain fragility to this concept which, in addition to succession and coherence, reveals also contradictions or that things exist at cross purposes, as well as failure, dissonance and incongruence that are all prominent and relevant. Furthermore, this field of tension between formalism and structuralism could be seen in terms of development, a view Striedter makes crystal clear in his description of the gradual transition from the inherent form to a semiotic system (pp. 106-107).¹⁸

The logical continuation of this linear development, however, leads to a question to which the temporal dimension is most important, namely “what comes afterwards”—in other words: how does later intellectual history deal with the conglomerate of formalism and structuralism? Striedter does not focus on this question, but he does consider it relevant: he describes Kalivoda and Kosík (p. 86) as the most important philosophically oriented Marxist- revisionist theorists of the 1960s. In this way, Striedter introduces a view according to which the formalism-structuralism complex is not understood as a history of growth or as progress. The neo-Marxists are looking for the philosophical application of the literary theory of formalism-structuralism but they are finding a constellation

17 Напряжение между эстетической автономией и общественным измерением искусства исследовал в своей статье 1997 г. Petr Václav Zima: Formalismus und Strukturalismus zwischen Autonomie und Engagement. Sieben Thesen. In: Wolfgang F. Schwarz (Hg.): Prager Schule. Kontinuität und Wandel. Frankfurt/M. 1997, S. 305-315.

Как пример можно привести послесловие Петра Штайнера под названием „The Roots of Structuralist Esthetics“. STEINER, Peter (ed.). *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929-1946*. University of Texas Press, 1982, s. 174-219.

18 Here Striedter cites Oleg Sus, 1968 study on the transition from formalism to structuralism (273), as well as Hans Günther's book *Struktur als Prozess* (1973), Mojmír Grygar (1968) and Miroslav Červenka (1973).

that opposes it. They see the (literary) devices of formalism as serving the purpose of a mere description of material. Only the conceptual approach in structuralism “makes sense” to them. Thus, the correlation between the two schools does not represent evolution. Rather, it is a war that Marxists, or at least socially oriented structuralists wage against the “primitive” formalist barbarians. As is well known, Marxists understand the development of social order as a teleological process. Seen from this angle, structuralism represents a highly developed form of formalism that is overcome and obsolete.

This new interpretation implies a hermeneutic question: how and when was the transition from formalism to structuralism described? Who initiated or implemented the canonization of this correlation, and when and how (and, at the end of the day also why) did this take place? What motivated the development from *method* (príom) and *defamiliarization* (ostranenie) to structure (and “function”)?

Another question would be what the constructive gaps are that are built into this narrative. What aspects of this strategic chronological alliance were described for different reasons only in a fragmentary way or were only implied or even left out all together?

Such questions concern the connection between avant garde art and art theory, particularly theory of the surrealism in Czechoslovakia. In the 1930's *surrealism*, along with *poetism*, was the most important avant garde school. The Group of the Surrealists was founded in 1934. Prague was repeatedly visited by André Breton, Paul Eluard, and others. However, in comparison to the emphasis placed on the important role of the Zaum language and futurism for the development of formalism, the connection between surrealism and structuralism remained an invalid or never realized analogy. Mukařovský mentions the theorist of the Czechoslovak surrealism of the 1930s Karel Teige among his four closest friends (along with the writer Vladislav Vančura, the theater director Jindřich Honzl, and the poet Vítězslav Nezval).¹⁹ In the academic year 1938/1939

19 Ondřej Sládek: MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Jan. *Život a dílo*. Prague, 2015, p. 120.

the prominent surrealist artist Jindřich Štýrský took a seminar with Mukařovský at the university.²⁰ Despite all that neither Mukařovský nor other members of the Prague School²¹ confronted the question of surrealism on a theoretical level,²² even though a certain affinity between the representatives of avant garde and those of the avant garde humanities undoubtedly existed.

Why did the Prague Linguistic Circle not consider surrealism in a more complex way and why did the results of the meeting of an aesthetic program with a theoretical school remain so insignificant? Jan Mukařovský's participation in the 1936 collection *Ani labuť ani lůna* represents an attempt at cooperation. As we learn from Vratislav Effenberger, who looks very seriously at the ideas inherited from structuralism in his unpublished study "Movements of Symbols" (*Pohyby symbolů*, 1961) and *Models and Methods* (*Modely a metody*, 1969) the reason for this reserved attitude could be found in the different emphases. Effenberger's surrealist analysis of poetry relates to the theory of Otokar Zich. Zich focuses on subjective perception, on the "psychic condition of perception" (Striedter, 85). According to Striedter this is a fundamental innovation as opposed to formalism, although formalism does not reduce the psychological dimension to any particular thesis, as pointed out by Ilona Svetlikova in her 2005 book *Istoki ruskogo formalizma* (Sources of Russian Formalism). While Mukařovský searches for the aesthetic effect in the artwork itself, Effenberger argues that the aesthetic effect is established outside the work, only in the act of interpretation. (p. 20)

Striedter believes that the basis for the creative reception of formalism in Czechoslovakia was the fruitful Czechoslovak intellectual context, including phenomenology, Husserl

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 125-126.

²¹ In 1932 a talk by Roman Jakobson was organized during the surrealism exhibition in Prague entitled Poetry 1932. However, Jakobson did not speak about surrealism but about the topic "What is Poetry." Ibid. p. 131

²² Perhaps we can mention as an exception the essay on Nazval's poetry volume *Absolutny Hrobař* (1938), in which Mukařovský offers a semantic-semiotic analysis. See *ibid.*, pp. 133-135

and Ingarden, as well as the philosophical concepts of Broder Christiansen and Ernst Cassirer. As the more recent analyses by GAKHN (Gosudarstvennaia akademiia khudozhestvennikh nauk) and GIII (Gosudarstvenii institut istorii iskusstva) show, the philosophical dimension played a bigger role in formalism than previously assumed. In the 1920s Georgij Vinokur, Secretary of the Moscow Linguistic Circle, suggests that the OPO-JAZ theory should be reconsidered in terms of Gustav Shpet's concept of inner form. Jakobson is skeptical toward the radical "Shpeticism," even though the polemic about the "inner form" was based on a misunderstanding of the concept.²³

In his essay and in his polemic about structuralism Effenberger refers not only to the surrealism teachings of André Breton, Paul Eluard, and Karel Teige, which were being intensively developed in Czech culture of the 1930s, but he also inspires a way of thinking that connects the focus of structuralism with that of the theory of mind. Effenberger's imagination theory works with memory (21), understood as an individualizing and updating interpretation, that should not be confronted with the current or the past framework of that which was remembered. Memories are no relicts of the past but attacks on our affectivity (útoky ze všech stran 23). Imagination could adjust itself, in order to legitimize the raw reality (přizpůsobivost imaginace zmocňovat se syrové reality, 21), a view at the heart of the thesis of the Young Surrealism. This thesis is fundamental for surrealism for, at the end of the day, surrealist poetics is based precisely on the ability for adaptation. It shows the foundations of aesthetics that, unlike formalism and structuralism, sees noetics as its main goal. Poetry is primarily an epistemological achievement. According to Effenberger, this is about discovering the fantastic in the real ("odhaluje fantastické v reálném", 21) or realizing the different links within reality ("rozeznávat vazby skutečnosti", 22), as he later says.

In the case discussed in this study, adopting the inherited theory was strongly motivated biographically, in the sense that transferring knowledge was regarded as a kind of mobil-

23 See GINDIN, S.I.. "Epizod epistolarnoi polemiki G.O. Vinokura i R.O. Jakobsona". In: *Izvestia Akademii Nauk*, Series Literatura i Iazik, vol. 55, Number 6. Moscow, 1966. P. 62

ity of persons. This is why in the 1920s and 1930s Prague was celebrated as a meeting point of ideas and their protagonists, where any intellectual exchange was fertile. At the same time, we could see surprising cultural and intellectual gaps too, and they also belong to the cultural history. In both cases, however, the biographical component plays a constitutive role.

The theoretical foundation of Russian formalism appeared in Prague in persona in the summer of 1920, when Roman Jakobson, the Chair of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and close friend of Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynyanov, and Osip Brik, settled in Czechoslovakia. However, he came to an intellectual environment where due to the local intellectual tradition there already existed a school of thought which anticipated the focus on function, structure, and aesthetic value. After he worked a few months as an employee (and interpreter) of the Mission of the Red Cross in charge of repatriation of war prisoners led by Hillerson (at the time this was about the most important agenda of world revolution).²⁴ Jakobson began his study at the German Charles University in Prague, where he later (1930) defended his dissertation on the versification of the Serbo-Croatian folk epos (*Über den Versbau der serbokroatischen Volksepen*).

From 1923 until the end of the 1920s Jakobson worked at the press department of the Soviet government (there was no embassy until the Soviet government recognized Czechoslovakia in 1934.) Jakobson did not attach the concept of formalism to his scholarly work—neither before nor after the foundation of the Prague Linguistic Circle. He went back to the question of

24 Solomon Isidorovich Hillerson (1869-1939) was a military doctor and a clerk of the revolutionary power who was in charge of the Russian war prisoners from World War I. In 1918 he became a representative of the people's commissariat of foreign affairs. According to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the return of war prisoners (including about half a million Russians) was used for the political purpose of disseminating the world revolution. The German diplomat Karl Freiherr von Bothmer described the atmosphere of the negotiations as follows: "Yesterday Hillerson was not able to restrain himself. To the complaint that the propaganda among war prisoners leads through depriving them of nourishment he answered tactlessly: "If the starving German soldiers become revolutionaries and if we can make them go to a demonstration by giving them two portions of a meal, then by giving them three portions you would be able to turn them into monarchists again." http://lib.ru/HISTORY/FELSHTINSKY/botmer.txt_with-big-pictures.html

formalism becoming a canon in a series of lectures at the Brno University in the mid 1930s, where he had become a professor at the beginning of the 1930s. In these lectures he, on the one hand, insisted on the existence of formalism in all Russian and Slavic cultures since the early Middle Ages but on the other hand he criticized the naivety and the mechanical approach of many formalist finds and formulations. Even though he analyzed individual articles and the approaches of many of his former allies on the pages of dozens of texts, he never mentioned the term “defamiliarization,” that later became the symbol and the brand-name of all formalist schools in Russian literary criticism and he mentioned in passing only one single time the work of Shklovsky *Iskustvo kak priem* (Art as Technique) which later became the canonical text of formalism. Jakobson cites this work only as an example of the (unfair) formalists’ accusations against Alexander Potebnja (p. 117)²⁵ whom he rehabilitated in his lectures by describing him as another precursor of formalism like Alexander Veselovsky.

Jakobson’s first programmatic study written in Czechoslovakia was the analysis of Khlebnikov’s poetry which was published in 1921 in Prague but in Russian and was entitled *Noveishaia russkaia poesia* (The most recent Russian poetry).²⁶ Considering all circumstances, it appears that despite the fact that the essay was published in Prague, this little brochure (of less than 70 pages) did not resonate particularly well with the Czech audience. Only those who had an immediate intellectual connection with this work reacted to it – Georgii Vinokur, Viktor Zhirmunsky, Boris Tomashevsky, and Viktor Vinogradov. The study became the canon only in retrospect. A Slovak anthology of the 1940s²⁷ which included a small fragment of *Noveishaia russkaia poesia* (just about 10

25 For more detail see GLANC, Tomas: « Ils s’opposaient à tout le monde » Le statut de la pensée chez Potebnja vu par Jakobson ». In: *Potebnja, langage, pensée, édité par Patrick Sériot & Margarita Schoenenberger*, Cahiers de l’ILSL, 46, 2016, p. 93-104.

26 JAKOBSON, R. *Selected Writings*. Vol. V: On Verse, Its Masters and Explorers. The Hague; Paris; New York: Mouton, 1979. pp. 299-354.

27 *Teória literatúry—Výbor z “Formálnej metódy”*, ed. & tr. Mikuláš Bakoš. F. Urbánek. Trnava, 1941, pp. 63-73.

pages) plainly identified this study with formalism. The editor of the anthology was the well-known Slovak literary theorist Mikuláš (Nikolai) Bakoš (1914-1972). He was born in Odessa (and knew Russian well), studied in Trnava, Bratislava, and Prague in the 1920s, participated as guest in the meetings of the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1930s, went through a period of Stalinism in his literary criticism after the war, and then became the most prominent representative of Slovak structuralism. We shall recall that *Noveishaia russkaia poesia* appears in European scholarship in the area of the humanities only in the beginning of the 1970s, when its translations into German, French (in quite an abbreviated version) and English were first published. The fact that *Noveishaia russkaia poesia* "actually" belongs to the formalism school is not in doubt. Jakobson states, for example, with a revolutionary pathos the following: "(...) the question of time and space as forms of poetic language is still foreign to literary scholarship." The author mentions Shklovsky in passing only in a footnote. Within the text, however, he renders his thesis that "form exists for us only as long as it is difficult for us to perceive it or as long as we feel the resistance of the material." Jakobson refers in more detail to Osip Brik and presents in summary the formalist conception of the development and the character of poetic language: "The form takes control over the material. The material completely overlaps with the form. The form becomes a template, it dies. A new input of material, of fresh elements of the practical language, is necessary, in order to allow the irrational poetic constructions to offer again joy or fear, to connect to what is alive."

Before the foundation of the Prague Linguistic Circle there were two other publications by Jakobson that resonated with the Czech intellectuals. The first one was the 1921 review of André Mazzone's book (*Lexique de la Guerre et de la Révolution en Russie*), dedicated to the influence of the revolution on the Russian language ("Vliv revoluce na ruský jazyk". *Nové Atheneum*, 1921). The review was printed in the magazine *Národní listy* (11.09.1921). In this work the formalist method plays no role whatsoever. However, from the point of view of method

ology, one could trace some influence of the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure related to the spontaneity noticed in changes produced by a linguistic collective. On the basis of a large quantity of practical material, Jakobson, who was profoundly interested in the revolution within the Russian vocabulary stock, shows the reflection of the new reality in the language. To do this, he uses his linguistic competence in defining the neologisms and the newly activated archaisms and demonstrates the receptiveness of the Russian language with regard to foreign influences. By and large, however, characteristic for this review is the sociolinguistic factography, and this is exactly how it was perceived. Then in 1923 his study on Czech versification was published in Berlin/Moscow and reprinted in Czech in 1926 under the title *Základy českého verše* (*The Foundations of Czech Versification*). This book attracted the interest of scholars and was repeatedly reviewed. The first edition of 1923 was printed as the 5th edition of the *Sborník po teorii poetického jazyka* (*A collection of essays on the theory of poetic language*) OPOYAZ-MLK. In addition to many others Nikolai Trubetskoy (*Slavia II*, 1923-24) and Grigory Vinokur also reacted to this publication (*Pechat i revoliutsiia*, 1923, 5).

In 1926 Jakobson became one of the co-founders of the Prague Linguistic Circle, whose head at the time was the well-known linguist Vilém Mathesius and when, among its prominent members were also the founder of phonology Nikolai Trubetskoy, the literary critic Jan Mukařovský, the literary critic Alfred Bem, who had nothing to do with formalism but rather was interested in psychoanalysis, and the representative of early semiotics and functional folkloristics Petr Bogatyrev.

Based on the unsystematic argumentation of some of the prominent members of the circle we observe that the thesis of the gradual transition from formalism to structuralism in the Prague School (this term appeared for the first time in 1932 in the materials from the first congress on phonetics in Amsterdam²⁸) left some questions. Within the historiography of the humanities, there is undoubtedly some reason to talk about

28 First International Congress on Phonetic Sciences, see DOLEŽAL, 1995, p. 35

the relationship or the genealogy of some of the postulates and methods found in formalism and in structuralism (see above), even though these schools did not create a clear set of signs that could help in identifying these relationships and genealogies and, in contrast to the ideologically heterogeneous Prague Linguistic Circle, here it is impossible to distinguish the actual representatives of each one of the two schools.

This continuity was described relatively late, only after World War II, aside from the few hints in the earlier work of René Wellek from 1936.²⁹ Wellek's thesis however was not supported by those he had been addressing at the meetings of the Prague Linguistic Circle since the 1930s. Wellek asserted (op. cit., p. 176) that the term *structure* (struktura) was the Prague replacement for the Russian term *form* (forma). This definition, which was not based on any references to representatives of the Czech structuralism, was later strongly criticized by Ladislav Matejka³⁰, a student of Jakobson. Matejka showed that in the postwar period this definition became a doctrine which appeared in different publications but remained without much resonance. (Among the authors who shared this view Matejka mentioned the author of the first monography of formalism, Victor Erlich, the post-structuralist Jeffrey Hartman, and the Soviet literary critic Yuri Barabash.³¹)

Constructing the thesis of the continuity between formalism and structuralism implies not simply registering the facts but also an act of creative intellectual work, of establishing a strategy or a particular plan. Until the 1980s, in Eastern Europe formalism and structuralism needed to be defended against the ideological restrictions. Thus, the necessity of establishing the idea of a canonical connection was related to the mechanisms of defence. A little later the Modernist canon

29 René Wellek: *The Theory of Literary History*. In: *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* 6. *Études dédiées au Quatrième congrès de linguistes*, 1936, pp. 173-192.

30 In his article *Sociologické zájmy Pražské školy*. In: SLÁDEK, Ondřej (ed.). *Český strukturalismus v diskusi*. Brno, 2014, pp. 13-14. Matejka emphasizes the social parameters of the literary studies in the Prague Linguistic Circle of the 1930s., that distinguished it from the approach in., *ibid.* P. 18.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

in literary criticism appeared to be in competition with the fashion for semiotics and in opposition to the influence of poststructuralism.

It was also necessary to have many studies in order to simply reconstruct the intellectual contribution of the idea of formalism and structuralism to the humanities. Until today, for example, there is not enough research done on the connection between the formalists and those who worked in the 1920s at the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAXN-Gossudarstvennaia Akademia Khudozhestvennykh Nauk) and the State Institute for the History of Art (GIII-Gossudarstvenny Institute Istorii Iskustva) mentioned above. In fact, scholars turned their attention to this philosophical contextualization only recently.³² Certain topics, such as the relationship between formalism and Lev Shestov's phenomenology or Roman Ingarden's theory, as well as the work of authors like Olga Freidenberg³³, who were barely confronted with formalism, have yet to be discussed.

From today's perspective, the genealogy of the major theoretical initiatives of the 20th century, which were repeatedly turned into a canon, does not need to be confirmed, and there is no defence necessary against the attempts to marginalize or disqualify them. Thus, other topics, which so far have not drawn much attention, now become central. One of these topics is the strategy of intellectual transfer, of transition or of construction of trans-national academic nets. Such a perspective stresses the equal importance not only of contacts, influences, and cooperation, but also of their absence, and of the cases of insufficient information or hampered processes of the reception and the development of particular impulses, knowledge, concepts, or concrete works. This approach

32 HANSEN-LÖVE, Aage; OBERMAYR, Brigitte; WITTE, Georg. *Form und Wirkung. Phänomenologische und empirische Kunstwissenschaft in der Sowjetunion der 1920er Jahre*. Paderborn, 2013.

33 In that regard N.B. Braginskaia writes the following: "At the deepest level the theoretical views of Freidenberg and the formalists were not contradictory but they missed each other. Tynianov and his friends and colleagues called their method formalist and the old academic literary criticism talked about the genetic study of literature. See Tynianov's anthology: *Vtorye Tynianovskie Chtenia*. Riga, 1986. Pp. 272-283

expands intellectual history to include history of theoretical concepts in the direction of history of texts, of their publications and reception, as well as the biographical dimension of academic contacts and the politics of the humanities. Regarding canon and canonization, the particular scholars, their intentions and approaches become most important as they have the authority to canonize and they are the ones who determine the particular form of the contacts and the relationship between canon and censorship.³⁴

In the case of Czech intellectual history before and after 1948, when the situation related to the ideological manipulation of academic life, of publishing, and of the humanities changed dramatically, two developments appear to have been particularly important. One of them concerns the roots of the Prague School and the debate about its genealogy. The other one concerns the relationship of the Prague School to the different forms of Marxism or the sociological orientation of research in the humanities. In both cases formalism plays generally either the role of a predecessor of structuralism or of its intellectual inspiration. As a rule, both the positive and the negative critique of formalism discuss its lasting connections, for which we cannot find too many testimonials in the thoughts of the authors who were considered representatives of different schools.

Overcoming formalism in literary criticism is a characteristic topic for the theoretical discussion in Czechoslovakia of the 1930s, even among those who were close to the school, i. e. within the Prague Linguistic Circle.

In his review of the Czech translation of Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose*³⁵ published in 1933, Wellek wrote that Benedetto Croce and his concept of intuition were more appropriate for the analysis of a literary work than formalism. Another scholar who criticized the "new formalism" (as a mixture of Russian

34 ASSMANN, Aleida; ASSMANN, Jan (Hg.). *Kanon und Zensur-Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II*. Paderborn, 1987.

35 WELLEK, Pené. Šklovského „Theorie prózy“, *Listy pro umění a kritiku* 2, 1934, č. 5, pp. 114-115.

formalism and Prague structuralism that distinguished this brand of formalism from that of Kant) in an article from 1934 was Kurt Konrád. Konrád was a prominent theorist whose point of departure in arguing against the “new formalism,” which he saw as idealism, is his poetic position, for idealism was unacceptable from a Marxist point of view and created only a “false reality.”³⁶ Břetislav Mencák,³⁷ translator from Scandinavian languages and a fighter against capitalism also rejected formalism from a Marxist point of view but in an even more straightforward way. On the pages of the journal *Čin* Mukařovský criticized Mencák’s direct attack on the *l’art pour l’art* direction in the area of theory. However, his review of the translation of Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* shows that he too sees only problems in formalism, or rather in the “phantom of formalism”³⁸ as he calls it. One of them is the fact that it is associated with the formalism of Herbert. On the one hand, Mukařovský insisted that the Prague school had its local roots in the formalism of its home-land, but on the other hand he considered this tradition to be one that was overcome. According to him, even Shklovsky spoke of formalism but meant structuralism (503). Shklovsky’s enemies criticized his theory mistakenly as “the vulgarization phantom of aesthetic Herbertism” (504). In fact Shklovsky meant more than that but did not express his thought in a way that was complex enough. The entire concluding part, or the second part of the review (505-508) focused on the confrontation between the complex and synthetic structuralism and the partial and reductionist formalism, which, as even Shklovsky realized, was merely a provocation in the given context. This is the reason why Mukařovský rejected it. The Catholic thinker Timotheus Vodička (not Felix Vodička) also considered Shklovsky’s theory insufficient in the sense that it did not take account of the “concept”

36 Svár obsahu a formy : (Marxistické poznámky v novém formalismu). First edition 1934. See also *Filosofický časopis*, Year. 5, 1957, č. 6, December, pp. 886-902. Reprinted also in the anthology of essays *Ztvárněte skutečnost*. Prague, 1963.

37 Ondřej Sládek: Jan Mukařovský. *Život a dílo*. Prague, 2015, pp. 107-108.

38 MUKAŘOVSKÝ, Jan. *Stuie I*. (Eds. Miroslav Červenka and Milan Jankovič). Brno, 2007, p. 503.

of the work. Similarly, the ideologist of the “new realism” Fedor Soldan³⁹ criticized Shklovsky’s unsystematic approach. In citing the end of Shklovsky’s preface (“If we draw a parallel to a factory, then I would be interested not in the state of the international cotton market, not on the politics of the trusts, but only in the numbers of the yarn and in the methods of weaving it,” *Theory of Prose*, Moscow, 1929, pp. 5-6) Mukařovský defended the importance of the international cotton market and the politics of trusts as an integral part of looking at questions from the perspective of literary criticism.

There are primarily two reasons for the increasing need of constructing some connecting link in theoretical thought or some general tale about Eastern European literary theory: 1) The different forms of this tale filled the “blank spot,” that was, supposedly, left by the official academic politics of the Eastern European countries, the blank spot where censorship and Soviet rules were dominating; 2) The participants in the processes of forceful transformations in the Soviet Union of the 1930s and in Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the 1950s, for whom it was possible to express their point of view publicly, modified the past in a way that presented their current situation in a convenient or acceptable way. So, some theorists, such as Shklovsky, wrote a “Monument to the scholarly mistake,” and others, such as Wellek insisted on the lasting connection between formalism and structuralism, both satisfying their own need to identify, in Wellek’s case, with the school of New Criticism in the USA.

In Czechoslovakia (and probably also in the Soviet Union, where the archives of the KGB are still sealed) Jakobson was under constant surveillance by the agents of the state security who were writing protocols of his activities. However, before the beginning of this surveillance the organs of the Academy of Sciences, which themselves were subject of observation on the part of the state security, personally and officially invited Jakobson.

39 SLÁDEK, Ondřej. Jan Mukařovský. *Život a dílo*. Prague, 2015, pp. 104-105.

In 1958 the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak communist party, *Rudé Právo*, published an article describing Jakobson as an enemy and an American agent and two days later the author of the article met with the president of the Academy of Sciences Zdeněk Nejedlý (notes about this meeting are preserved in the archive of the state security). It turned out that Bohuslav Havránek, an old friend of Jakobson and since after 1948, dean of the department of philosophy and then president of the ideological Higher School of Russian language and one of the founders of the communist Academy of Sciences (1952), invited Jakobson, but that his supervisor did not know about this. Nejedlý called Jakobson an old enemy of the communist party of Czechoslovakia (in fact Jakobson had never had any problems with the Czechoslovak communist party) and a proponent of “all –isms existing at the time” (obviously having in mind in the first place poetism, surrealism, formalism, structuralism, futurism, cubism, and generally modernism). This is the portrait that an agent named Růžek paints of the scholar on 30.01.1957⁴⁰ – as proof of the chaotic ignorance of the common employees of the organs of the government who were supposed to watch Jakobson’s activities. The Prague Linguistic Circle was described as a “language circle at the university,” Jakobson, according to them, “created a new academic method in linguistics (or philology), the so-called structuralism, which is an academic, anti-Marxist, bourgeois, literary school supporting poetism (the main direction in Czech avantgarde, note TG), surrealism and everything irrational in literature.”

Jakobson was somehow always surrounded by a canonical aura, even among the agents of the state security who were supposed to watch him, and who attributed the creation of structuralism to him and him alone, the very school of thought that, in their interpretation, supported ‘everything irrational.’ To accuse particularly Jakobson who shared the idea of dialectics and who, before the war, read Bukharin and Lenin very carefully, of having an anti-Marxist position, was complete-

40 ABS 305-704-2-0014

ly unfounded. However, his indifference regarding the actual Marxist postulates was a fact. This indifference was one of the reasons why Jakobson was relatively less interesting and less influential in the Czechoslovak discussion of structuralism of the 1960s, a discussion that was taking place in an atmosphere of a de facto abolished censorship but that nevertheless saw Jakobson's participation rarely and determined his role more as a predecessor of Jan Mukařovský.

In the intellectual climate of Karel Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete* (*Dialektika konkrétního*, 1963) dominated by the revisionist Marxists of the 1960s, the main point was reality, the raw reality. This connected even modern Marxists to surrealism. Intellectual plausibility became a time-determined principle of selection that involved some authorities and put others in the background. This was how Kalivoda defined the juxtaposition of the mechanical and the dialectic structure, considering the former to be formalism and the latter structuralism (KALIVODA, p. 19).

The revolution, the teleology, the dialectics, the existence of methodology, the control of language, the critique of formalism—all this meant nothing. In this text Jakobson was a formalist and had remained merely a predecessor of Mukařovský. And, according to Kalivoda, the anti-philosophical formalism represented simply a springboard for the scientific method of structuralism (pp.21-22). Elmar Holenstein had expressed this position already in the 1980s: "This is most clear in overcoming the 'mechanical derailing' of the 'formalist school,' that overlaps in time with the rise of Prague structuralism (...). Overcoming formalism was prompted in Russia and in Czechoslovakia by the Hegelian tradition (which at the time was marked by a strong Marxist influence). In Russia this took place in the Bakhtin-circle, whose first advocate outside Russia was Jakobson, and in Czechoslovakia, mainly through Mukařovský.⁴¹

41 HOLENSTEIN, Elmar. „Die russische ideologische Tradition“ und die deutsche Romantik. In: JAKOBSON, R; GADAMER, H. G.; HOLENSTEIN, E. *Das Erbe Hegels*, II. Suhrkamp, 1984. HOLENSTEIN, 1984, p. 124.

Mukařovský denied formalism its philosophical and aesthetic dimension. The artificiality of the work should be first transformed into a question about the aesthetic meaning, about meaning itself, and about the impact the reviving challenge of an artefact. (pp. 22-23) "This connection was never seriously contested" writes Jurij Striedter (83). We could express this also in another way: "No one ever cast serious doubts on this connection." Does this, however, mean there are no doubts?

There was a view that diminished the problem and it was supported by René Wellek, Victor Erich and the lightheaded and very influential Terry Eagleton. The former two were important also for Striedter. He looked from this perspective not only at the works of the Prague Linguistic Circle but also at the theoretical positions defined since the 1940s and after the war (most importantly by Felix Vodička; see his *Literární historie, její problémy a úkoly* (1942) and *Počátky krásné prózy novočeské – příspěvek k literárním dějinám doby Jungmannovy* (1948). Then, there was also the view of Oleg Sus, Robert Kalivoda, and Vratislav Effenberger that emphasized the problem. At the end of the day, the tension between the different interpretations allows us to relive the old theoretical approaches in a productive way.

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